

VZCZCXRO6445

OO RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHNP RUEHROV RUEHSR

DE RUEHSI #0858/01 1251331

ZNY CCCCC ZZH

O 051331Z MAY 09

FM AMEMBASSY TBILISI

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1512

INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUEKJCS/OSD WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TBILISI 000858

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/05/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [GG](#)

SUBJECT: GEORGIA: ESCALATION OF PROTESTS POSTPONED AFTER
TANK BATTALION MUTINY

REF: A. TBILISI 850

[B](#). TBILISI 852

[C](#). TBILISI 857

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN F. TEFFT. REASONS: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

[1](#). (C) Summary: The non-parliamentary opposition told the press that it intends to escalate the protests by blocking major roads into Tbilisi between 4pm and 5pm local time on Tuesday, May 5. Non-parliamentary leaders intend to give President Saakashvili 72 hours to resign or else they will continuously block all major highways, and entry points. GoG interlocutors tell us they do not intend to stop the protesters on Tuesday, but would not allow protesters to block entry points or major highways. Meanwhile, Irakli Alasania (Alliance) has been speaking privately with Parliamentary Speaker Bakradze and agreed in principle to a framework to enter negotiations. Protesters remained in very small number (300-500) in front of Parliament and the Public Broadcasters Building. At mid-day on May 5, the opposition announced that it would postpone the escalation of the protests (to wit, the blocking of major highways leading into Tbilisi), in light of the mutiny at the tank battalion base in Mukhravani. Soon after, major opposition leaders, including Alasania, went to the press to accuse the Government of staging the "virtual uprising" in order to obstruct opposition plans. End Summary.

[2](#). (C) Comment: We anticipate that tensions will rise among the non-parliamentary opposition if Alasania sticks to his promise and agrees to enter negotiations since all others as of now, apart from perhaps David Usupashvili (Republicans - Alliance), appear to have made the choice to try to bring President Saakashvili down by bringing the country to a standstill. MoIA was prepared to permit a one hour blockage of roads, but views shutting down major highways, and border crossings as a red line so if/when the blockages occurs, the police would likely intervene. EU Ambassadors, EU representative Peter Semneby, and the Ambassador have expressed their views publicly and privately to non-parliamentary leaders that dialogue is the only solution and major road blockages are dangerous, an illegal escalation, and would be viewed as such. End Comment.

Protests Down to Next To Nothing - Escalation to Ensue - MoIA Will Respond

[3](#). (C) The protests have become more sparsely attended both by protesters and leaders alike, indicating a broad though unspoken acknowledgment among the non-parliamentary opposition and their supporters that the protests have run their course, and are unlikely to bring about Saakashvili's resignation. Alasania told the Ambassador that members of the group were now trying to out-radical each other and that Nino Burjanadze was working behind the scenes to undermine him, leading the charge against any compromise. Alasania said members of the National Forum (a relatively obscure opposition party), were among the most radical pushing for

confrontation. National Forum leader, Gubaz Sanikidze stated on Tuesday night on Kavkasia TV that if the GoG broke up the protests, an armed revolt would follow. Early, Tuesday morning, protesters assaulted and beat a journalist in front of the Public Broadcasters building and according to reports, the protesters are becoming increasingly aggressive. Speaker Bakradze told the Ambassador that the GoG would permit the opposition to conduct a one hour blockage (so it would likely further damage the opposition's standing in the country), but not allow protesters to bring the country to a stand still and that the GoG would ensure that major highways and ports of entry would remain open. Mid-afternoon May 5, the opposition decided to postpone its plans to expand the protests and block major highways in light of the tank mutiny crisis in Mukhravani.

Alasania Still Talking Compromise and Dialogue - Will Actions Follow?

14. (C) Alasania and Bakradze told the Ambassador separately that a meeting had taken place on Sunday evening and general agreement had been reached between the two on moving negotiations forward. Alasania would not call for Saakashvili's resignation, but would call for pre-term elections using a phrase along the lines of "when the time is appropriate" which would give Alasania wiggle room, leave a main demand on the table, and take ultimatums of the President's resignation out of the equation. Other areas Alasania would put forth were Constitutional changes to strengthen Parliament vis-a-vis the President; Electoral Code changes (and possible early elections to follow). Alasania said that David Usupashvili (Republicans - Alliance) was on

TBILISI 00000858 002 OF 002

board in principle albeit privately, other "ally" David Gamkrelidze (New Rights - Alliance) was not supportive but would not stand in the way of negotiation. Bakradze told the Ambassador the same, calling the meeting "positive". Bakradze said that he would be in touch with Alasania regarding going public with the initiative after Alasania met with other non-parliamentary opposition leaders. Alasania was due to present his case to the other leaders on Monday night, May 4 and had planned to make a public announcement either on Tuesday, May 5, or Wednesday, May 6. Alasania met with the opposition group again May 5 to try to convince them to negotiate, but talks were suspended due to the tank mutiny crisis in Mukhravani. When the Ambassador spoke to Alasania following the meeting, Alasania said that he would delay his announcement until things clarify about the tank battalion mutiny.

Patriarch Has Meeting - All Agree Dialogue Only Solution

15. (C) The Georgian Patriarch had an audience, organized by the Papal Nuncio to discuss the current protest situation May 14. The Patriarch called for dialogue, unity, and compromise. The Ambassador repeated his call for dialogue, and expressed his personal concern that blocking highways, ports, and other infrastructure represented an unfortunate and illegal escalation which would only provoke a confrontation, highlighting the potential danger for the average Georgian. After the Ambassador expressed his views, a number of other EU Ambassadors rose to echo his points. (Embassy Comment: EU Ambassadors and their representatives have been telling us privately, and telling non-parliamentary leaders the same message. End Comment.) From Brussels, Peter Semneby said that his position on picketing was the same - that protests should be taken out of the streets and disputes should be resolved through the political process.

TEFFT